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From OSS to CIA: An Exciting Record Raises Questions

OSS: The Secret History of America's
First Central Intelligence Agency. By
R. Harris Smith. University of California Press. \$10.95.

By Bill Hibbard
of The Journal Staff

THOUGH this book is a history of the Office of Strategic Services, its most provocative lines deal with the Central Intelligence Agency, lineal descendant of OSS.

In his painstakingly documented work, R. Harris Smith concludes that CIA, despite its penchant for supporting entrenched dictatorial governments, has not yet become "the reactionary monster the New Left has created as its straw man." But he warns:

"Unless the agency leadership makes a determined effort to renew the OSS passion for democratic dissent in yet another generation of American intelligence officers, the reality of CIA may soon coincide with its sinister image in the intellectual community."

Through the reign of Allen Dulles, Smith writes, CIA possessed a strong intellectual ferment of liberals and conservatives interacting, a basic tenet in the philosophy of William (Wild Bill) Donovan, founder of OSS. Smith quotes Robert F. Kennedy as observing that during the McCarthy era, CIA became a liberal refuge and collected some of the best minds in the country in the process.

And though it has been responsible for some monumental mistakes, such as the Bay of Pigs disaster, and questionable actions, it has at times also produced more accurate intelligence than the nation's other intelligence

agencies, Smith relates. He notes that during the Johnson administration's Vietnam buildup, while other agencies were reporting how well the war in Vietnam was going, CIA reports were pessimistic and actually antiwar.

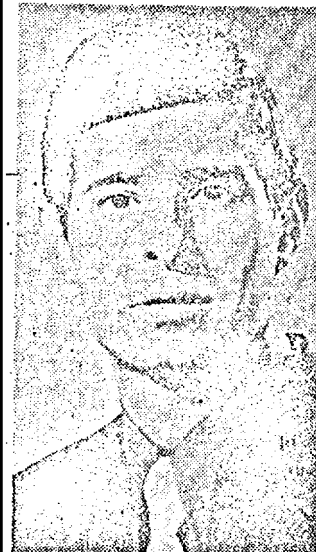
In his preface, Smith makes a plea that certainly bears heeding:

"For too many years, social scientists have paid scant attention to the broad problem of official secrecy. The majority of American academicians may spend hours denouncing the sinister CIA, yet not a single university in the United States fosters a serious research effort into the organization and activities of the 'intelligence community,' that massive bureaucratic conglomerate that has played such a major role in our foreign policy.

"That vacuum ought to be filled. The academicians should form a partnership with journalists in providing the American citizenry with a reasoned and thoughtful critique of the excesses of clandestine bureaucracy. I offer this book as a first step toward extending intellectual responsibility into a new field of public concern."

Heavily detailed, Smith's account of OSS organization and operations may tell the plain reader more than he wants to know about this amateur espionage, clandestine politico-military machine that, despite shortcomings, emerged with the respect of its foreign competition. But it's fascinating reading for anyone who wants to delve into these World War II seeds of victory in Europe and in the Orient.

Drawing upon the nation's intellectual storehouse, Donovan patched together one of the highest powered brain trusts ever assembled. The organization was peppered with men destined for high political, professional and academic posts, among them



R. Harris Smith

Arthur Schlesinger, Stewart Alsop, John Gardner, Arthur Goldberg, Walt Rostow, David Bruce, C. Douglas Dillon, Allen Dulles and Richard Helms, the current CIA chief. Contributors to OSS during World War II — though not members — were two Asians named Ho Chi Minh and Mao Tse-tung, both of whom were at least partly on our side at that time.

Smith's book, three years in the making, helps us understand how complex the situation was in both China and Indochina as World War II ended and why the muddle has continued.

Despite its massive detail, this is a readable work, and it is likely to become the standard reference work on OSS. The author is a political science lecturer and was briefly a CIA research analyst.

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